

No. 3. On Brotherly Love.

1st St. John, 4th Ch. 21st.

And this commandment have we from Him, that he, who loveth God, love his brother also.

As it was the chief design and constant employment of our Saviour's life, all the time He vouchsafed to dwell amongst us, to go about doing good both to the souls and bodies of his creatures, forgiving their sins and relieving their necessities, so is it also the chief business of his Gospel, to pass the great example He has given us into a rule, and as far as we are able to follow it, strongly to recommend it to our imitation.

I was He therefore "who so loved the world" that He vouchsafed even to die for it.—I was He "who gave us a new commandment that we should love one another."—And this is the great duty which the author of this Epistle does all along in this Chapter, and more particularly in the words of my text, earnestly and affectionately enforce upon us.

"Beloved," says he, "let us love one-another, for
 "love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God,
 "and knoweth God—he that loveth not, knoweth not God,
 "for God is love." Where the Apostle shews us that he best
 deserves the title of Son of God, who most nearly resembles
 the heavenly Father—"who is merciful even as He is
 "merciful."

He goes on to shew us how this love of God towards
 us was manifested: and amongst the several instances
 he might have mentioned, insists on that amazing ex-
 pression made of it "in sending his only-begotten Son
 "into the world, that we might live thro' Him"—we,
 wretched men! who before lay dead in trespasses and sins;
 and then he reasonably infers that "if God so loved us, we
 "ought, surely, to love one-another."—And this is the
 only return, the only acknowledgement our gracious God
 expects of all his love & kindness to us, even "that we love
 "one-another".—For, as for God, "no man hath seen
 "Him at any time." God is not capable of receiving
 any benefit from the best of our services: He is without
 the reach of our acknowledgements, "nor does our good-

"ness, as the Psalmist speaks, extend to Him." In this case, therefore, He is graciously pleased to make our brethren the receivers of his debts—to assign the payment unto them:—these we daily see and converse with: these are the proper objects of our love, and the continual necessities, either of their souls or bodies, are every moment calling for the expressions of it.

But to shew how vain our pretences are to the love of God unless we love our neighbor also, he concludes his last argument in the words of my text—and this, &c.

In discoursing on which words I shall first shew how we are to express our love to one=another—that love which the Apostle here commands us in the text.

2dly, I shall shew some of those motives and obligations, whether natural, or religious, that may dispose us to the practice of this duty.

And lastly, I shall offer a few necessary directions about the manner of performing it.

First, I am to shew how we are to express our love to one another.

Our brother, therefore, to whom we are here commanded to express our love may be considered in two respects, either of his soul or of his body, and, in both, does continually become the proper objects of our charity.

Would to God, that, with regard to the spiritual state, there were fewer objects of our charity than there are!—but there is, God knows, such a spirit of irreligion and profaneness gone out amongst us—so outrageous a malice in the enemies, and so cold a zeal in the professors of the Gospel, that, what with instructing the ignorant—reproving the evil-doers—confirming the good, and praying for all—(& in every one of these respects is a good christian commanded to express his love) a man may meet with continual employment for his charity; and will find it no such inconsiderable part of his duty, to minister, as he ought, to the spiritual wants & necessities of his brethren.

And indeed this part of our charity is both the most useful and of the most universal obligation. He that freely gives his bread to the poor, that visits his afflicted brother, either in sickness or in prison, must be confessed a good & generous benefactor to the miserable part

of the world.—He deserves a praise, and shall receive a reward accordingly. But of how much nobler use is that man's charity who "fills the hungry soul with goodness"—with wholesome advice & direction in those things which are to make him one day happy or miserable for ever?—discountenancing vice by bold & seasonable reproofs, and supporting Religion by all the encouragement he is capable of giving it? who relieves the spiritual infirmities of a sinful neighbor—who "brings his soul out of prison, and "restores him to the glorious liberty of the sons of God?"—

And this, we find, was the method our Blessed Saviour constantly observed in doing good.—His works of mercy—and such indeed were all his works—were contrived in such a manner as served at once both the spiritual and temporal necessities of his creatures. "Stand up" and walk," was generally followed with—"thy sins are forgiven thee," and the power of his miracles designed to make way for the reception of his doctrine.

But this part of our charity is not only the most useful but of the most universal obligation. As for relieving the temporal necessities of our brethren—many people may

prove themselves incapable of performing this sort of charity.—But as for the expressions of it to the souls of men—these—tis in every one's power to make one time or other. Every one, for instance, however unhappy in his circumstances, may yet charitably rebuke a brother that offendeth—he may assist him with "ghostly counsel & advice," and whenever he sees him running into sin may seasonably reprove him for it; or lastly, he may, without any expense, pray to God to give him Grace to the repentance of his former, and the amendment of his future life, and so by some one, or all these means, reclaim a sinner "from the error of his ways, and save a soul from death."

Let us now see how we ought to employ our charity towards the temporal necessities of our brethren.

There are many who would not refuse their poor brother, the charity of their wishes, or even the interest of their prayers. But tell them it is not enough to give kind words or good wishes where real kindnesses are required, that we are "not to love only in word, neither in tongue, but in deed & in truth," they are shocked at the severity of the doctrine;

and, like the young man in the Gospel, who, it seems, had religiously observed all the rest of the commandments, start back, when their Saviour enjoins them not to sell all—but a part only of what they have, "and give to the poor."—"But their debtors sure we are," if the law of nature—if either the Gospel, or the example of Christ can make us so. 'Tis a detraction from the wisdom & justice of Almighty-God to imagine that ever He created any thing with a design to make it miserable. The poor were made to employ the charity of the rich, and the rich to relieve the necessities of the poor, to support their honest labor and unsuccessful industry. How far, O Blessed Jesus! how far are we from loving our poor brethren, as Thou hast loved us! Thou for our sakes wast content to become poor, to leave the fulness of the Godhead, and "empty" thyself into the form of a Servant! We on the contrary are unwilling to abridge the least of our excesses to support a sinking neighbor, and rather chuse to overcharge ourselves with too much than enable him to have enough!

Having shewn how we are to express our love in

consulting both the spiritual and temporal interests of our brethren, I come now to offer some of those motives and obligations, whether natural or religious, that may dispose us to the practice of this duty.

God=Almighty, who best understands, and most tenderly consults the true interests and advantage of his creatures, has implanted in us as strong an inclination to be charitable to our neighbor, as to be religious towards Himself, and made us equally disposed to give "glory to God on high, and to express good-will towards men."

This is that generous heat which warms our souls with joy at the happiness, and with pity at the misfortunes of our fellow-creatures—that inclines us to advance the one, and relieve the other. To do good to others is indeed to gratify the bent of our most noble inclinations. To deny our assistance to a necessitous neighbor, according as our ability permits, is offering violence to one's self. "The merciful man" says Solomon, "does good to his own soul, but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh."

But we shall find still greater reason to take all occasions of expressing our love both towards the souls and

bodies of our brethren, if we consider the obligations which engage us, as Christians, to the performance of this duty.

Love, we find, is the fulfilling of our Saviour's Laws—the great commandment of his Gospel, and employment of his life. The God of love has made it the distinguishing character of his followers—"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples—if ye have love one to another." Thou therefore that believest in that Jesus, who, even when we were his enemies, refused not to lay down his life for our sake—"who covered all our sins and healed all our infirmities"—Thou to whom so much is forgiven—canst Thou, I say, love but little? Canst Thou, who hast obtained so much mercy from thy master, content thyself with shewing none to thy fellow-creatures?

Thou that believest in that Jesus, who went about all his life long doing good, instructing the ignorant, reclaiming the wicked, and confirming the good—canst thou sit idly by, and see tamely thy brother plunging headlong into sin and ruin—without giving him one Christian admonition, one charitable reproof? Wilt thou not

do thus much to prevent the destruction of that soul which Christ even died to save? Thou who believest in that Jesus who for our sakes became poor, who went about hungry & thirsty—in heat & in cold, in watchings and fastings, and yet unwearied still in doing good, in giving feet to the lame, & eyes to the blind, in relieving the unfortunate and feeding the hungry (tho' often put to the expence of a miracle to accomplish it) canst thou behold, without concern, the afflictions of a distressed Family, unmoved at their tears, and deaf to the cries of the widow & the fatherless?

He that can do this, may, without breach of charity, be suspected of having forfeited his humanity; he is so far from being a Christian, that he hardly deserves the name of man.

But, 'tis not the hungry beggar we wrong, when we deny him sustenance;—'tis not the thirsty man we injure when we deny him drink—No—'tis your Saviour whom you starve—'tis Christ himself whom you deny: for He has expressly told us, that inasmuch as “ye have not done it to one of your needy brethren, ye have not done it unto him.”

I now proceed to offer some necessary directions about the manner of performing this duty.

In doing good to the souls of our brethren, we should behave in such a manner, as shall leave no room for them to suspect us of any other design than merely an honest zeal for God's glory, and a generous concern for the salvation of our neighbor's soul. When, therefore, we undertake to instruct an ignorant, or reprove a sinful brother, we must take care to improve his knowledge without upbraiding him for the want of it. We must express all our anger and resentment not against his person, but his sins. We are to let him see, 'tis not any quarrel of our own we pretend to espouse; that it is not to us the injury is offered, but to his God and to himself.

Men will not be compelled by force, and driven to what, even, naturally they have the greatest mind to. The violence of the persuasion strikes too hard on the inclination, and makes them fly back from whatever carries the least appearance of necessity, to which had they been gently led on, 'tis more than probable they would have done of choice. The generality of men choose rather to be per-

juaded to their ruin than driven to their good. And we may so far venture safely to imitate the Devil, and to borrow his arts, to express, at least, as much cunning and good-nature, in saving men's souls, as he does in destroying them.

Let us imitate rather the Saviour of the world, the great physician of our souls, who rebuked with all authority indeed, but with all mildness too. He expressed much indignation at the wickedness, but much mercy to the souls of sinners. Like the good Samaritan He poured only oil and wine into the wounds of his patients, and rebuked with the spirit of meekness, as well as of truth.

We are to perform all our works of charity, whether to the souls or the bodies of our brethren, without any the least ostentation, and with as much privacy as the case will allow.

What our Blessed Saviour has told us with respect to alms-giving in particular may be properly applied to all the other branches of charity—"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in

"heaven." — To do acts of charity to be seen of men, destroys their merit, perverts their design, and disappoints us of their reward. All the poor reward we can possibly expect from the doing them in this manner — alas! how inconsiderable is it? A little vain popularity and the being civilly talked of. But here the vain-glorious man often disappoints himself. For the world always allows that man the greatest character who least affects it.

And indeed if we rightly consider it, the doing acts of charity in a public pharisaical manner, not only takes away the kindness, but converts it into the greatest injury. It serves rather to expose than to relieve the necessities of our brother, & fixes a shame & disgrace on him, which, the best services we can do him afterwards, will never be sufficient to repair. The last rule we are to observe in expressing our love is both the cheerfulness and the perseverance of it. — And in this, also, is our Blessed Saviour's example of the greatest use and direction to us.

How were all the courtesies He shewed to mankind — all the good He did to an ungrateful world, how were they all repaid with the blackest of its ingratitudes —

with the most violent of its persecutions? How was his doctrine, which "came to bring light into the world," rejected and misapplied? How many enemies did those merciful reproofs continually make him? Enemies, for no other reason, but "telling them the truth?" How were those very miracles—those "works, which even forgave their "sins, and healed their infirmities;" blasphemed and abused, and impiously ascribed to "Beelzebub, the prince "of the devils?" And yet, notwithstanding all this, what one object did he ever pass by unregarded? I was but saying "Lord have mercy upon me!" and the poor wretch's wants, whether, of soul or body, were immediately relieved.—And at last, to crown the perfection of his love, He willingly laid down his life for those, who had so often designed treacherously and cruelly to have taken it away from Him.

This our Blessed Saviour did.—Let us, who are his disciples & followers, "go now and do likewise." "Let "us learn of Him to love our enemies—to bless them that "curse us—to do good to them that hate us—and to pray "for them that despitefully use us and persecute us."

Then shall we "live no longer to ourselves, but unto Him
" who died for us and rose again"—we shall then promote
the great end of our creation, the honor of God, and the Sal-
vation of our Brethren.

Theoph^s. J. St. John.

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